



LEADER'S GUIDE 10

EPHESIANS 5:21-33

CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS: MARRIAGE

Starting in Ephesians 5:21-6:9 Paul addresses Christian Relationships

As you start this study, ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand what God has said through Paul.

DAY 1

1. Read Ephesians 5:21-6:9 Note the different groups who have the responsibility of subjection and to whom.
 - Christians to each other
 - Wives to husbands
 - Children to parents
 - Slaves to Masters (or employees to employers)
2. Now Read Ephesians 5:21-33 three times. What is the main idea?
The main theme is that relationships in a marriage and in Christian community are modeled by Christ's relationship to His Church.
3. Many of us react to the words: "submit to" or "be subject to". According to verse 21, who is to "submit to" or "be subject to"? To whom are they to "submit to" or "be subject to"?
 - Every Christian is to submit to each other. Submission is mutual.
 - What is the basis for this submission as stated in verse 21?
Submission is out of reverence for Christ.

"If we are resting on the finished work of Christ, subjection to others is not an ordeal." Dr. Frank Sells

TO DIG DEEPER: Read Galatians 5:13, Philippians 2:3 and 1 Peter 5:5. What do these verses say is involved in submission?

Galatians 5:13 says we are called to be free, but we are to use that freedom to "serve one another in love." Philippians 2:3 says we are "to consider others better than yourselves – to imitate Christ's humility, that is our "attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ's (verse 5). 1 Peter 5:5, in addressing young men, urges them "to be submissive to those who are older", and all of them (elders and younger) should be clothed in humility toward one another. Peter, in a quote from Proverbs 3:34, reminds all of us, whether old or young, that "God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble."

Read Philippians 2:5-10 – who is our role model? Jesus Christ

Use a Bible Dictionary or regular dictionary or Concordance and then write a definition of submission.

Greek word is hupotasso – to subordinate, be under obedience to, or subjection under, submit self unto or put self under. Literally it means being subject to. The grammar indicates that this mutual submission is associated with the filling of the Holy Spirit.

DAY 2

1. The word “submit” or “subject to” in verse 21 is a verb. Grammatically it is linked to verse 18 as the last of four present participles which describe being filled with the Holy spirit. It also begins verses 22-33 – it supplies the verb for verse 22. As we move forward we see how this looks in 3 relationships – wives and husbands, parents and children and masters and slaves (or employer and employee).

2. Read verse 22. Who is to “submit” or “be subject to”? To whom? In what attitude?

Wives are to submit to their husbands in the attitude of as to Christ.

Read verse 24, Colossians 3:18 and Titus 2:4-5. Note the word used for wives to do.

The word used is “to be subject to” or “submit”

Now read Ephesians 6:1,5; Colossians 3:20,22. What word is used in these relationships?

The word used is “obey”

How are these 2 words different?

The person called to submit, is to do so voluntarily, to yield her own rights for follow the husband’s leadership. Obey is not in the verses about the wife submitting. Obedience is given to someone who has the authority to require that obedience.

“Submission is something quite different from obedience. It is a voluntary self-giving to a lover whose responsibility is defined in terms of constructive care; it is love’s response to love.” NOTE: the husband is not told to make the wife submit to himself – Paul speaks directly to the wife here.

These verses on submission compare the relationship in marriage between husbands and wives to Christ and the Church. In Colossians 3:18 wives are to submit as is fitting in the Lord. Christ’s attitude is implied; He submitted to death on the cross in fulfilling His Father’s will. Husbands are also bound to their wives by Christ’s attitude, which was not only submissive but also sacrificial. The husband’s responsibility to the wife will be discussed later in greater detail. Titus 2:4-5 reminds those in a marriage relationship of the importance of being appropriate witnesses for the Lord. Paul uses an older woman’s responsibilities as an example, in training younger women to: (1) love their husbands and children; (2) to be self-controlled and pure; (3) to be busy at home; (4) to be kind; and (5) to be subject to their husbands. Teaching these behaviors to other women glorifies the Lord and honors His Word. Ephesians 6:1,5 directs children and slaves to be obedient as you would to Christ with respect, fear and sincerity of heart. The obedience discussed in Colossians 3:20-22 is more of a command for children and slaves with distinct differences between a wife’s responsibility. (Paul has provided “Cliff Notes” for Ephesians for us in Colossians 3:18-4:1). “Submit to the Lord, then you will know how to relate to your husband. Submit because you love Jesus!” Dr. Frank Sells

3. Read verses 23 and 24. What is the husband’s role according to verse 24?

The head of the wife

What does it reflect? Christ the head of the Church.

The Greek word “head” is used here in a metaphorical sense. It means “origin” as in the source (head) of a river. See Genesis 2:18-23. If Paul wanted to convey the idea that the husband “rules over” the wife, he would have used a different Greek word.

Now read verse 24. What does the wife submitting to her husband reflect?

The church submitting to Christ.

The husband’s leadership role in a Christian marriage is analogous to Christ’s with respect to His Church and is described in verses 23 and 24. The husband should be a “source” (i.e. origin) of forgiveness, love, care and grace. He is responsible to love his

wife and not in a 'pro quid quo' manner. This means going more than half-way; a Christian marriage is not a 50/50 relationship. It is 100% for both. The wife's "submitting" in verse 24 is more of a gracious acceptance of her husband's love and care. She recognizes her husband's leadership in the home and responds to him without usurping his authority. "The husband is not superior to the woman, but he has been given authority over her for her protection and defense, which is to be exercised in love." (Walter Wright) Charles Erdman puts it "the affectionate deference which married women should show to their husbands, expecting in return self-sacrificing devotion and love".

TO DIG DEEPER: Read Ephesians 4:15-16. Reflect on these verses and Ephesians 4:24. The role of the wife reflects the church and the role of the husband reflects Christ. What, result, according to Ephesians 4:15-16, can result if the wife submits to her husband?

The result of a wife submitting to her husband will result in love and grace abounding in their marriage and family.

Seen in this perspective there is a mutual tenderness and mutual caring in the family. The wife's responsibility is to follow and respect her husband. As seen in Ephesians 4:15-16 Christ is head in that the rest of the body derives from him the health and strength which allows each part to play its own distinctive role. In like manner the husband is the source of enabling the wife to fulfill her role by his sacrificial love.

DAY 3

NOTE: 3 verses are addressed to the wife, 8 verses are addressed to the husband, 1 verse to both.

The greater number of verses addressed to husbands reflects their great responsibility in a Christian marriage. It is important to notice that nowhere in these verses does Paul define the husband's role in terms of authority over his wife. In fact, the word authority is not used once in 5:22-6:9. (Coleman and Peace)

1. In verse 25, what are husbands instructed to do? In what manner?

Husbands are to love their wives, just as Christ loved the church.

Love is what the husband gives by way of his part in the mutual submission. This attitude stands in contrast to Jewish teaching. "The rabbis asserted that money, the contract, and intercourse make marriage. When they enumerated what else a man 'owed' to his wife, they seldom mentioned love" (Barth). As for Greek culture, although certain philosophers such as Aristotle taught that men ought to love their wives, they used a mild word for love (phileo) signifying the sort of affection a person has for family. (Coleman and Peace)

Read verses 28 and 33. This is so important that it is repeated 3 times.

Repetition in God's Word underlines the importance of what is written.

2. The Greek word used here for love is "Agape". In verses 25-27 Christ's love for the church is the example of this type of love. What 5 things did He do for the church as noted in these verses.

He gave Himself up for her, make her holy, cleansing her, present her to Himself radiant, make her holy, blameless without stain or wrinkle or any blemish.

This is the type of "agape" love shown by Christ to His true family. "Agape" love is characterized by sacrificial, self-giving action. It is not primarily an emotion. It shows itself in concrete action rendered on behalf of the other. It does not exclude the elements of mutual help, partnership between equals, passionate desire and sexual

fulfillment. (Coleman and Peace) It does involve putting aside one's own interests to care for, devote himself to his wife's good. (NLT) NOTE: 5 verbs are used: love, give himself up, make holy, cleanse and present. "These five verbs . . . describe the unfolding stages of Christ's commitment to his bride". (Stott)

"by the washing with water and the word" – a reference of the bridal bath prior to the wedding that was the custom of both Jews and Greeks. It is a metaphor that being regenerated is pictured as being cleansed by water. One author states that this pictures the confession of faith by the baptismal candidate in which baptism pictures that Christ's death cleanses us from sin and sets us apart to a new life of holiness.

"to present her" – At a Jewish wedding the bride was presented to the groom by a friend. This was understood as a sacred duty because it was first performed by God when he brought Eve to Adam (Genesis 2:22). In this case, Jesus is both he who presents and he who receives the bride. (Coleman and Peace)

"radiant" – The word in Greek is endoxos which translates to resplendent or glorious. On one level, it refers to the beautiful garments worn by the bride. On another level, it refers to the very radiance of God himself, which the bride, the church, has as a gift from Christ, her bridegroom.

3. God instituted marriage with Adam and Eve – see Genesis 2:24-25. As Christians we believe marriage is holy and sacred. From Ephesians 5:24-27 describe why this is so.

These verses compare Christ's relationship to His Church as the model for a Christian marriage, which is therefore holy and sacred.

Paul is following a long tradition in Scripture. The Old Testament often pictured God's relationship to his people in terms of a marriage covenant (Isaiah 54:4-6; Jeremiah 2:1-3, 31:31-32, Hosea 1-3). In the New Testament Christ is seen as the bridegroom (Mark 2:19-20; John 3:29). (Coleman and Peace)

This passage presents a high view of marriage – marriage, as a picture of the relationship between Christ and His Church, is a holy union, a living symbol, a precious relationship that needs tender, self-sacrificing care – The Biblical Ideal. (Coleman and Peace)

"A wise and Christ honoring husband will not take advantage of his leadership role, and a wise and Christ-honoring wife will not try to undermine her husband's leadership" (NLT footnote).

DAY 4

1. Verse 28 begins with "In this same way" or "so", referring to Christ's love for the church. According to this verse how is a husband to love his wife?

As his own body.

"The deep-rooted instinct to care for and protect oneself is to be carried over to the wife who through sexual intercourse has become one flesh with her husband." (Coleman and Peace).

2. In verse 29 what does this love involve? Again, who is the model for the husband?

The husband is to nourish and cherish his wife. Christ is the model.

This verse affirms again that the model for a husband's love for his wife is Christ's love for His church, which is unconditional and sacrificial. A higher standard is not found in the Bible. This love involves spiritual and physical leadership and caring.

3. In verse 31 what is Paul emphasizing about the marriage relationship?

The physical relationship, their sexual union.

This refers back to Genesis 2:24. The physical union in marriage brings a deeper oneness to the relationship – a mystery.

A Biblical marriage is summarized in Genesis 2:24 by the phrase “become one flesh”. Paul does not view marriage as some sort of spiritual covenant devoid of sexuality. The union of husband and wife merges two persons in such a way that what affects one also affects the other. (NLT) For the man to love his wife is to love one who has become a part of himself. (NIV) Oneness in marriage does not mean one loses their personality, but to care for the spouse as you would care for yourself, helping the person become all they can be. (NLT)

In a Biblical marriage God’s role is acknowledged; God, as well as those wedding guests assembled, are witnesses. God’s role is not acknowledged in a civil ceremony. Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:7-9 both state: “So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate.” Although a pastor ‘performs’ a Christian marriage, God is actually joining the man and woman in marriage.

The mystery of Christ – who is God – uniting with humans in spiritual oneness is even harder to comprehend.

DAY 5

1. Verse 33 summarizes the instructions. The husband is to Love his wife. The wife is to Respect her husband.

The gauge here is “Is this how I want to be loved?” When a husband loves his wife in this way he will receive, in return, respect. (Coleman and Peace)

2. The historical context of Ephesians 5:21-33 is important. In Jewish law, a woman was a “thing”, not a person, she had no legal rights. In Greek culture women were for courtesan pleasures, prostitutes for daily use and wives for legitimate children. In Rome, divorce was easy and women were repressed. Paul’s view here is radical. Based on verse 21, submission is to _____ - One another. In verse 22 wives are to defer only to _____ - “your husband” (not to all men).

First century culture taught that a woman was to defer to all men. The restrictive term “to your own husbands” makes the wife’s subordination resemble the yielding which a senator gladly offers to a fellow senator, but not to any government spokesman or other interlocutor. (Barth) (Note it does not say the husband is the Lord, but as you would to the Lord)

3. According to verses 25-27, submission is defined and qualified by Christ. According to verse 25 wives are submitting to what kind of love?

Sacrificial love.

This is Christ’s love – agape love. This is the model for love in a Christian marriage.

DAY 6

Paul addresses women on their own right as individuals able to make their own choices. He does not address them through their husbands. He speaks to wives and husbands on the same level. Both have major responsibilities in the marriage relationship. Each wife and husband are to willingly choose to fulfill those responsibilities.

These passages on Christian marriage are antithetical to our society and to any civil marriage ceremony. In a Christian marriage: 1) God is joining the couple; 2) as believers God's Holy Spirit indwells the couple; and 3) Christ's sacrificial love for His church is the model for the marriage. The "becoming one flesh" is both a physical and spiritual union which binds the couple in mutual love, respect and faithfulness. The author of Hebrews in 13:4-5 writes that "Marriage should be honored", and we are exhorted to be "content with what you have". God's statement of faithfulness to His people follows immediately: "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you." (Deuteronomy 31:6) God's faithfulness to us is the model for faithfulness in marriage. If you are married, how has this passage helped you gain a better understanding of God's intent for marriage? What one thing will you do this week for your spouse? For your marriage? If you are not married, what have you learned about what God intends marriage to be? What qualities are important to you for a future spouse? How can you use this passage with a friend, child or even a parent who is dissatisfied with their marriage?